The Mystery of Paracletos in the Gospel of John: A Study of Greek, History, and Prophetic Figures

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Abstract

The term *Paracletos* (παράκλητος) in the Gospel of John has been a long debate among theologians, philologists, and historians of religion. In Christian theology, this word refers to *the Holy Spirit* who descended after Jesus' ascension. However, philologically, the Greek word means "defender", "helper", or "intercessor", which originally referred to a personal figure. This article examines the term *Paracletos* in terms of linguistics, the context of the Gospel of John, the history of acceptance in the early church, and its comparison with historical figures that may be related, including the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

1. Introduction: The Historical Problems of the Parakletos

The Gospel of John occupies a unique position in the Christian tradition. It differs in style from the three synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke) and emphasizes more on the metaphysical aspect of Jesus as the Word of God (*Logos*).
But in the midst of this spiritual discourse, one term emerged that became the center of controversy: **Parakletos**.

In John 14–16, Jesus mentioned that after his departure, there would come *another Paracletus*, also called *the Spirit of Truth*. The text reads:

"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another *Paracletus* , that he may be with you forever" (Jn. 14:16).

This statement raises the question:

- Who *are the other* Paracletos?
- Is he a divine spirit or a human person?
- And is it possible that this Greek word underwent a shift in meaning in translation or church tradition?

These questions have been the subject of interfaith debate for nearly two millennia.

2. The Linguistic Origin of the Word Parakletos

Etymologically, *Parakletos* is derived from the Greek Koiné:

- *para* (παρά): "Beside it"
- *Kaleo* (καλέω): "Call"

It literally means "who is called to be by (someone's) side". In the context of first-century Roman-Jewish law, the term was used for an **advocate or defender in court**—someone who spoke on behalf of the defendant.

This word appears five times in the New Testament:

1. John 14:16

2. John 14:26
3. John 15:26
4. John 16:7
5. 1 John 2:1

Interestingly, in 1 John 2:1, Jesus himself is called *Paracletos*:

"We have one *Paracletus* in the Father, the just Jesus Christ."

That is, Jesus was the *first Paracletus*, and in the Gospel of John he promised the coming *of another Paracletus*.
Semantically, this means a personal figure that has a similar function—not the same spirit.

3. Paracletos in the Context of John's Gospel

The text of John 14–16 provides specific characteristics:

Verse	**Main characteristics of Parakletos**	**Textual meaning**
John 14:16	Coming after the departure of Jesus.	A new figure, not Jesus himself.
John 14:26	Sent by the Father in the name of Jesus.	Has divine legitimacy.
John 15:26	Testify of Jesus.	True defenders of Jesus' teachings.
John 16:7–13	Bringing the truth, teaching new things, rebuking the world, speaking not of itself, and preaching things to come.	Very strong prophetic characteristics.

If these verses are read literally, the Parakletos is not an abstract spirit, but rather an active figure who teaches, speaks, witnesses, and has a universal moral mission.

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4. Interpretation of the Christian Tradition

The early Church interpreted *Paracletos* as **the Holy Spirit**. This interpretation appeared around the 2nd century AD, along with the development of Trinity theology.

However, this interpretation raises several textual problems:

- The Holy Spirit is already known in the Old Testament (*Ruah Elohim*), not a new entity that is "to come."
- In John 14:16 Jesus mentions *another Paracletus* (ἄλλον παράκλητον). The use *of another* word (*allon*) hints at different figures, not the same spirit.
- *Parakletos* has the legal meaning ("defender"), while the Holy Spirit in the Christian tradition is more metaphysical spiritual.

Thus, some researchers argue that the term has undergone **theological reinterpretation**, not philological error, to support the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

5. Text Problem: Parakletos vs Periclutos

Some classical Muslim writers and modern philologists have suggested the possibility that the word in question is not *Parakletos* (παράκλητος) but *Periklutos* (περικλυτος). This word means **"the praiseworthy"** or **"the most noble"**—the direct equivalent of the Arabic **Ahmad (أحمد),** another name for Muhammad as mentioned in the Qur'an. As-Saff [61]:6:

"And (remember) when Jesus son of Mary said: O Children of Israel, verily I am the messenger of Allah to you, confirming the book before me, and giving glad tidings of a messenger who will come after me, whose name is Ahmad."

In early century ancient Greek manuscripts (without vowels, without spaces, all capital letters), the distinction between **ΠΑΡΑΚΛΗΤΟΣ** and **ΠΕΡΙΚΛΥΤΟΣ** is very thin and easily misplaced, especially by non-Greek writers.

Visually:

ΠΑΡΑΚΛΗΤΟΣΠΕΡΙΚΛΥΤΟΣ

They differ only in one letter and vowel mark, which were not written in those days.

Therefore, from a **linguistic and paleographic point of view**, the possibility of this copying error **is not impossible**, although it cannot be proven for sure without a manuscript containing the form *of Periklutos*.

6. Historical Interpretation: Human or Spirit Figures?

Independent researchers divide two main views:

(a) Paracletos as *Holy Spirit*

This view is held by almost all Christian denominations. Paracletos is the "Spirit of Truth" who descends on the day of Pentecost to accompany the disciples.
Weakness: it is difficult to explain how an abstract spirit "teaches all things" and "speaks not of himself".

(b) Paracletos as *prophetic human figures*

Some liberal theologians and orientalists consider that John's text is more suitable for pointing to the human figure sent by God after Jesus, because the activity of Paracletos is very "personal" (teaching, speaking, witnessing, coming, going).

7. Historical Candidates Who Have Been Submitted

Candidate	Time	Supporting arguments	Debilitation
Holy Ghost	Since Pentecost	Christian traditions; Spiritual Experience.	Not in the literal sense of *Paracletos*; not the "other" of Jesus.

Candidate	Time	Supporting arguments	Debilitation
The Apostle Paul	±5–67 m	Spreading the teachings of Jesus to the Roman world.	Many of his teachings deviated from Jesus (the Trinity, the law).
Montanus	±135–170 m	Claiming to be Paracletos; admitted by some followers.	Condemned heresy by the Church.
Mani (Manes)	±216–276 m	Declare himself a universal messenger; glorify Jesus.	Dualistic Gnostic doctrine; not monotheistic.
Muhammad PBUH	570–632 m	Appearing after Jesus, bringing new revelations, glorifying Jesus, speaking in the name of God, teaching global morals.	The semantic differences of the Greek (*Parakletos–Periklutos*) have not been proven by the manuscript.

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8. Evaluation Based on the Characteristics of John 14–16

John's Characteristics	Holy Ghost	Paul	Sperm	Muhammad
Coming after Jesus	✴	✅	✅	✅
Personal figure	❌	✅	✅	✅
Sent by God	✅	Confess	✅	✅
Teaching the Truth	✴	✅	✴	✅
Not speaking of himself	✴	❌	❌	✅
Testifying of Jesus	✅	✴	✴	✅
Glorifying Jesus	✅	❌	✴	✅
Declaring things to come	✅	✅	✅	✅
Global impact	✴	✅	✴	✅

The results show that descriptively, the figure of Muhammad best meets all the elements written in the Gospel of John.

9. Paracletos in the Perspective of Semitic Language

In the context of Semitic languages, many theological concepts are rooted in the form of "vocation or intermediary". The word *Parakletos* has a semantic equivalent to Aramaic and Arabic:

- Aram: *Menahhem* — comforter, penolong.
- Arabic: *Shafi'* (الشافع) — intercessor, defender.
- Arabic: *Aḥmad* / *Muḥammad* — the praiseworthy, the most glorious.

The semantic connection between *those sent to defend and teach* and *the praiseworthy* shows a symbolic continuity between the Gospel of John and the prophecies of the Qur'an.

10. Historical Approaches: Impact and Feasibility

When viewed from history, figures such as Montanus and Mani had limited influence and tended to be local.
Meanwhile, the Apostle Paul was indeed a great influence on Christian theology, but he was not considered a "Paracletos" by Jesus himself.

The Prophet Muhammad emerged six centuries later, bringing pure monotheism, justifying the teachings of Jesus, and expanding spiritual and legal influence to the world. In an objective context, only this figure fulfills **the universal prophetic pattern** as implied by the text of John.

11. Correlation with Qur'an Verses

The Qur'an (QS. As-Saff [61]:6) records the words of Isa al-Masih:

"Verily I am the messenger of Allah to you... and give glad tidings of a Messenger who will come after me, whose name is Ahmad."

The name *Ahmad* comes from the root **ḥ-m-d (حمد),** which means "praise", and is literally synonymous with the Greek *Periklutos (περικλυτος)* — "the most praiseworthy".
The closeness of this meaning makes some philologists think that the prophecy of Parakletos could have come from an early form of meaning *that is praiseworthy*, not *defensive*.

12. The Views of Western Scholars

Some non-Muslim orientalists who note this relevance include:

Name	Work	A brief view
George Sale (1734)	*Preliminary Discourse to the Koran*	Mentioning the possibility that Paracletos was referring to Muhammad.
David Benjamin Keldani	*Muhammad in the Bible*	The former Catholic bishop who concluded Parakletos = Ahmad.
Maurice Bucaille	*The Bible, the Qur'an and Science*	Judging John's prophecy is logical when interpreted as a human figure.
Tor Andrae	*Mohammed: The Man and His Faith*	See Muhammad as the spiritual successor of Jesus.
Hans Küng	*Christianity and the World Religions*	Acknowledging the functional parallels between Muhammad's mission and John's prophecy.

13. Neutral Analysis: Paracletos as a Prophetic Phenomenon

From all sources, one common thread emerges:
Parakletos is a **phenomenon of post-Jesus revelation**—not just a doctrine of the Holy Spirit, but a symbol of prophetic continuity.

In the history of Semitic religions, God has never stopped sending moral messengers after one figure dies.
Thus, *Paracletos* can be understood as a representation of the "prophet of the last days" in the context of Abrahamic theology.

14. Discussion of the Spirit and the Real Person

An important debate is: are Paracletos spirits or humans? In the Gospel of John, Paracletos:

- **Come and go.**
- **Speak and teach.**
- **Acceptable or rejected by the world.**

This characteristic points to a figure with an empirical existence, not just a spirit entity. The Holy Spirit in Christian theology cannot "come" and "go", because he is always present with God.Thus, in a linguistic and contextual framework, Parakletos **is closer to a human figure with a prophetic mission**.

15. The Strongest Candidates Based on Historical-Critical Methods

Through filtering by the seven main characteristics of the Gospel of John, the results are as follows:

Figure	**Literal similarities**	**Consistency of meaning**	**Historical impact**	**Globality of the mission**	**Total**
Holy Ghost	3/7	low	Spiritual	Universal (abstract)	5/10
Paul	4/7	Partial	great (Christian)	limited Europe	6/10
Sperm	3/7	weak	Regional	Failed to survive	4/10
Muhammad	7/7	very strong	revolutionary	Global, 14 centuries	10/10

Thus, in a neutral and empirical approach, the **figure of the Prophet Muhammad** is **the most powerful candidate** who meets the description of Parakletos historically, linguistically, and sociologically.

16. Conclusion

This study shows that *the term Paracletus* in the Gospel of John:

1. Of Greek origin means a personal figure who defends and teaches.
2. In the context of John, it refers to the one who came after Jesus, brought new revelation, and glorified his teachings.
3. The Christian tradition shifts it to the metaphysical concept of "Holy Spirit", but its literal meaning is closer to a prophetic human figure.
4. Linguistically, the resemblance to *Periklutos* ("the praiseworthy") reinforces its connection with the name *Ahmad/Muhammad*.
5. Historically, only the Prophet Muhammad has fulfilled the entire description of the Paracletos, both in terms of mission, revelation, and global influence.

However, this conclusion **is not dogmatic**, but rather the result of a rational analysis of textual and historical data. For Christians, Paracletos can still be understood as the Holy Spirit; To a neutral researcher, he may be a certain historical figure; while for Muslims, it is believed to be the last prophetic prophecy.

17. Closing

The debate over Parakletos shows that the heritage of religious texts has always been open to cross-cultural interpretation. Through the lens of history, John writes in a world steeped in Aramaic, Greek, and Semitic influences — a world that recognizes the terms "helper," "defender," and "praiseworthy" in many languages. Therefore, studying Paracletos is not just about looking for theological figures, but about tracing the continuity of moral revelation between the major religions.

As the main message of the Gospel of John itself:

"The Spirit of Truth will lead you into all truth."

Perhaps the message is not just for one group, but for all of humanity.

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